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STATE FOR PM, WHA/CEN, NEA/I-PM(SEPSTEIN)

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TAGS: [ES](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: SURVEY OF IRAQ DEPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS  
REF: SECSTATE 150164

Classified By: Ambassador Charles Glazer for reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) As requested reftel, we provide the following assessment of the political and legal challenges El Salvador would face in order to deploy troops to Iraq in 2009 without the umbrella of a United Nations (UN) Chapter VII mandate.

¶2. (C) The government of El Salvador (GOES) has maintained a military presence in Iraq since August 2003. Besides the U.S., it is the only troop-contributing nation in this hemisphere. To date the Armed Forces of El Salvador (ESAF) have rotated nine contingents through Iraq, and are presently in the process of formalizing a tenth. According to the Salvadoran constitution, the President does not need Legislative Assembly approval to deploy the ESAF abroad. In order to confer the maximum political legitimacy possible, however, President Saca sought and obtained (most recently in August 2006) a Legislative Assembly vote in support of allowing the ESAF to remain in Iraq until the termination of the current UN Chapter VII mandate.

¶3. (C) President Tony Saca has stated on numerous occasions that the decision to deploy troops to Iraq is an expression of gratitude for the U.S. "standing by" the GOES during the Salvadoran civil war. He has also indicated that Salvadoran troops will remain in Iraq "for as long as they are needed."

¶4. (C) While we have no reason to doubt President Saca's resolve, there are several possible impediments to continuing his seemingly open-ended commitment of Salvadoran troops to Iraq. In terms of possible scenarios, a UN Security Council resolution would be the ideal means of securing any continued Salvadoran military presence in Iraq. Scenarios based on anything other than a UN resolution, while not impossible, would certainly prove far more difficult vehicles for continuing an ESAF presence.

¶5. (C) Moreover, while Legislative Assembly approval is not a legal prerequisite to an ESAF Iraq deployment, it is, most likely, a political necessity. Furthermore, the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly seems unlikely to vote in favor of the deployment of Salvadoran forces to Iraq in the absence of a legitimizing UN resolution or other mechanism, such as a bilateral Iraqi request for a continuing troop contribution. In a recent interview in national daily La Prensa Grafica, Minister of Defense Otto Romero stated that the lack of either a UN mandate or Legislative Assembly approval would necessitate a Salvadoran withdrawal from Iraq. Saca has pulled back Romero in the past when necessary. However, Romero's analysis does preview the difficulties the GOES will face in trying to continue the ESAF deployment absent a UNSC

resolution.

¶6. (C) In light of the apparent necessity for both a UN mandate and Legislative Assembly approval, El Salvador does not strike us as likely to deploy troops to Iraq under either scenarios A or D outlined in reftel. Some variant of scenarios B or C, under which El Salvador either negotiates a bilateral agreement with Iraq (scenario C reftel), or acquires third party right and obligations pursuant to a U.S. bilateral agreement with Iraq (scenario B reftel), may be workable. We would need to formally broach the issue with the GOES, as well as engage Foreign Ministry lawyers on the finer points of the various potential deployment scenarios proposed in reftel, before being comfortable enough to give an authoritative answer.

¶7. (C) Reftel also requests an assessment of the domestic political challenges host government might face in agreeing to a post-UN mandate deployment to Iraq. El Salvador is entering an electoral cycle that will feature municipal and legislative elections in January 2009, followed by Presidential elections in March 2009. In these elections, the ruling right-of-center National Republican Alliance (ARENA) will square off against the opposition left-wing Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) in what promise to be hotly contested elections. Entering into an agreement to deploy Salvadoran forces to Iraq under anything other than UN auspices on the cusp of key national elections could prove politically difficult for the ruling ARENA party, as well as potentially damaging to the ARENA Presidential ticket's electoral prospects. It is doubtful that President Saca's stated resolve to stand fast in Iraq would easily outweigh domestic electoral considerations.

¶8. (C) On the other side of the political spectrum, the FMLN has consistently opposed sending Salvadoran forces to Iraq, even under the current UN mandate. Should the FMLN win the 2009 Presidential elections, and/or gain an upper hand in the Legislative Assembly, they will almost certainly move to terminate El Salvador's military deployment to Iraq in short order.

¶9. (C) Mission will continue to monitor and report on executive, legislative, and electoral developments that could impact any future Salvadoran deployments to Iraq.

¶10. (C) Comment: The GOES would certainly be more likely to send a tenth rotation in the absence of a UN resolution with the prior granting of Major Non-NATO Ally Status (MNNA). Post strongly urges the granting of MNNA as soon as possible.  
End comment.  
Glazer